Statistics can help you defend product choices

If it's true that you can prove anything with statistics, personal-computer users now have a tool to help them win more battles. It's a quarterly publication called **Computer Industry Abstracts** that provides you with enough statistics about computers to win any battle of product choices.

The authors of the publication, Data Analysis Group, compile raw data and market research from dozens of sources, add some forecasts of their own, and present the results in this handy new journal.

Apple versus IBM

For example, let's say you're the "PC manager" (the person responsible for selecting the best personal computer hardware and software) for your company or department, and the boss wants to know why you recommended IBM PCs instead of Apple computers.

In a jiffy, you can refer to the latest issue of Computer Industry Abstracts and cite some of these statistics:

✔ In 1984, IBM had a 43 percent share of the business and professional market for personal computers, selling a whopping 1.112 million units; while Apple had only a 9 percent share with 238,000 units sold to the same audience.

✔ In corporations, 34 percent already have selected IBM PCs, 22 percent IBM PC-XTs, and 3 percent IBM PC-ATs. In contrast, Apple IIe computers have been selected for use in 6 percent of all corporations, the Apple II Plus in 3 percent, Apple III in 3 percent, Macintosh in 3 percent and the older Apple II in 2 percent.

✔ In a survey of planned purchases by businesses without PCs, 59 percent planned to buy IBM computers, 19 percent IBM-compatible computers, and 11 percent Apple computers.

Further, you could find the reasons people give for buying IBM PCs. About 65 percent said it was important because it was a "safe decision."

In the 58-page, First Quarter 1986 edition of Computer Industry Abstracts you'll also find sales forecasts for each segment of the computer industry, statistics showing which software is the most popular, and separate sections for storage devices, printers and plotters, terminals and communications equipment.

Next to each set of statistics or forecast is the source from which the numbers were taken, the publication date and the page number. In addition, if the authors of the Computer Industry Abstracts used some of the numbers given by the source as the basis for their own estimate of *future* performance, an asterisk (*) is placed next to the item.

For example, in the "Storage" section (all about various computer storage devices, like floppy disks, hard disks, etc.), an asterisk appeared next to this one:

Unit sales of 3.5-inch drives: 1984, 0.64 (millions); 1985, 1.22; 1986, 3.04; 1987, 5.20; 1988, 8.95; 1989, 12.43.

The reference cited in the abstract was PC Week; the article, titled "IBM will introduce 3.5 inch-based system in 86," Dec. 10, 1985, page 115. This little tidbit probably sends shivers through the manufacturers of larger disk drives, and alerts the rest of us about an impending shift away from 5.25-inch disks.

In the "PC Software" section, you'll find some stunning information about the sales of Lotus 1-2-3 (the financial spreadsheet program) versus its competitors. For the period of January through July 1985, here are the market share statistics: Lotus 1-2-3, 65 percent; SuperCalc, 3 percent; IBM Planning Assistant, 3 percent; Multiplan, 2 percent; pfs:Plan, 2 percent; Flashcalc, 1 percent; others, 24 percent.

This will certainly make you think twice before buying one of the others. The reference cited is PC World Magazine, December 1985, page 219.

So if you're hungry for market data like this, literally hundreds of morsels of juicy information are provided.

Who needs it?

The publication is probably best for two groups of people:

✔ Corporate PC managers who may be in constant need to defend their product recommendations.

✔ Computer industry analysts and marketing people.

In both cases, there is an ongoing need for up-to-date market data, and it's provided here in a succinct form. At $195 a year, the publication is much less expensive than other market research journals that cover the computer industry.

I particularly like the publication because it provides data from many sources. Other market research journals are more limited because all the data presented is based upon their own research.

Want to receive a free copy for review? The authors have offered to provide readers of this column with a complimentary copy. It's a perfect way to judge for yourself if it would be helpful in your situation. Write to Data Analysis Group, 8263 Vista Drive, La Mesa, Calif. 92041 and mention my name.

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